

Buddhism in Tibet



PART 2

p. 41-66 Buddhist Art

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Part one of the lecture stopped at the influence of China on Tibetan art.

A purely Tibetan direction, with Esoteric Buddhism, combined the already existing beliefs, Lamanism and Bon, with Buddhism.

Both scholars and the Bönpo themselves distinguish between original Bön and modern Bön. "Original Bön" refers to the indigenous religion of Tibet, which was animistic (believing that nature is pervaded by good and evil spirits) and shamanistic. Modern Bon is difficult to determine since Buddhism absorbed it so completely. Lamanism will be discussed later.



Chinese influence.
Notice the facial features.



Uniquely Tibetan.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibetan Buddhism is a unique form of the religion, known as Lamanism, after the Tibetan name for a monk.

Extremely harsh natural conditions combined with early shamanistic practices (including the indigenous practice of Bon) produce a varied and complex Buddhist pantheon.

This combination often resulted in **brutal imagery and powerful colors** with fierce deities transformed into protectors of the Buddhist faith.

The Wheel of Life,



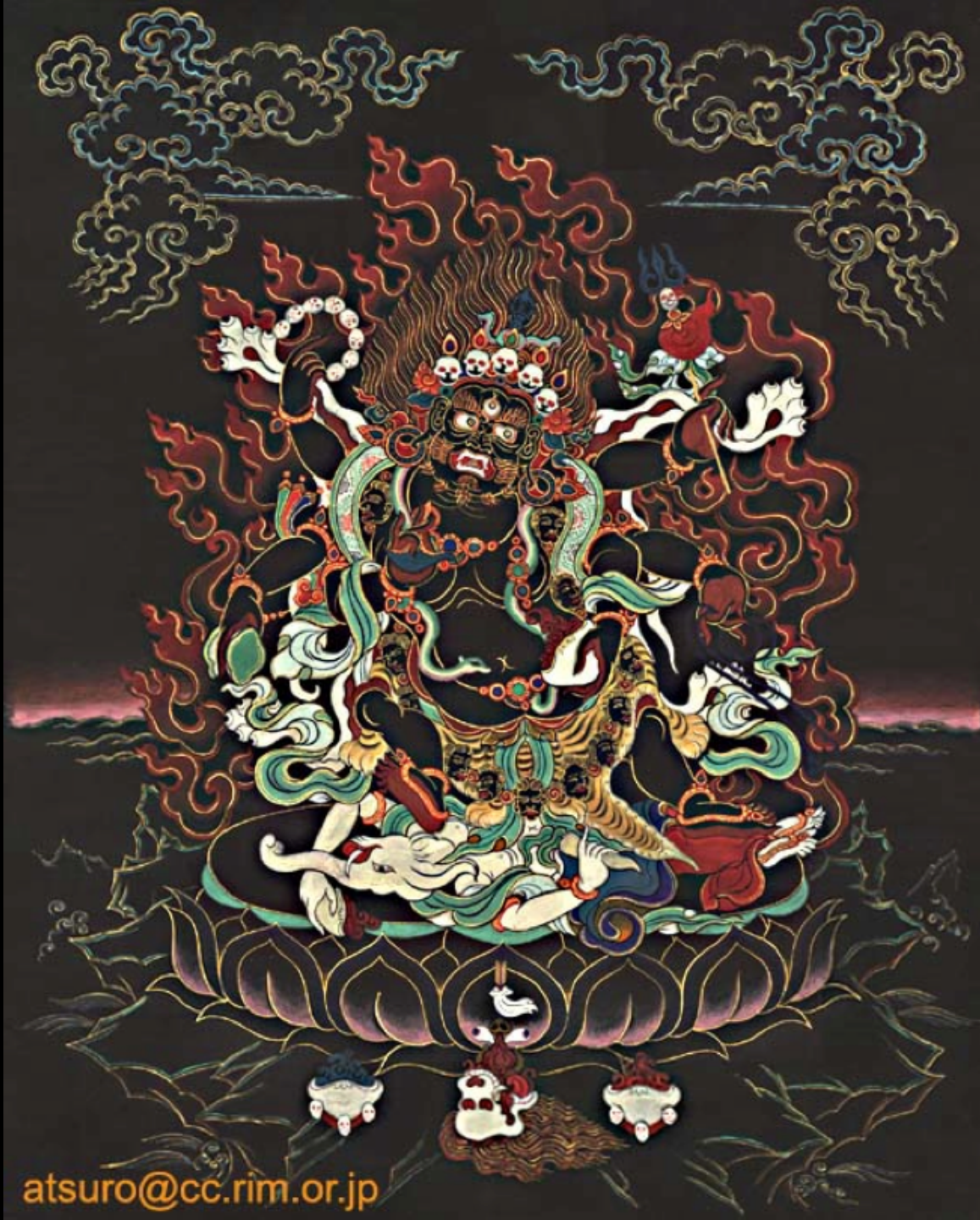
BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tantric Buddhism also known as the Vajrayana (diamond vehicle), can visualize the Buddha not just as the peaceful figure we know from earlier art but also as a wrathful deity and as the intimate union of male and female.

Look really carefully at this one.

Chakrasamvara (Tibetan: Khorlo Demchok) *Chakra of Supreme Bliss*

He is in union with his Wisdom Consort Vajravarahi.
Their embrace symbolizes the union of wisdom and skillful means.
Unity and diversity are one.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

The images of the wrathful Buddhas are representing Tantric texts that say the poisonous emotions, such as passion and wrath can be removed by cultivating and transmuting the emotions themselves.

“Just as water that has entered the ear may be removed by water and just as a thorn may be removed by a thorn, so those who know remove passion by passion itself. Just as a washer man removes the grime from a garment by means of grime, so the wise man renders himself free of impurity by means of impurity itself.”

Yamantaka, Destroyer of the God of Death

Yamantaka is a violent aspect of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who assumes this form to vanquish Yama, the god of death. By defeating Yama, the cycle of rebirths (samsara) that prevents enlightenment is broken.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Within the Tantric tradition Buddhas can also be pictured as a union of male and female.

These figures are known as yab-yum, a Tibetan word for male and female or mother and father.

It is difficult to interpret the texts in regards to whether these images are intended to represent sexual union or to function as symbolic representation of a mind that has transcended all dualities, including the distinction of sex.

We saw this male/female union in Hinduism as well. Some different meanings and intentions but similar.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibetan painting ranges in size from tiny manuscripts to colossal hangings.

The walls of monasteries are covered with murals and cloth thankas.

The subject matter is vast, including historical figures, portraits of lamas, individual deities of the esoteric pantheon, ferocious protectors and mystics. Depictions of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni and events from his life.

The top image is from a festival in Tibet where a really large thanka painting is unrolled on the side of a mountain. The bottom image is from the inside of a monastery. Both photos are taken by me on my trip to Tibet.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Tara

The figure of Tara, the female counterpart of Avalokiteshvara, originated in India where she was one of a number of Mother Goddesses alongside Lakshmi, Parvati and Shakti. With the development of the Mahayana school of Buddhism, she was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon.



A statue of Tara in one of the small chapels at the Pelkor Chode monastery, Gyantse, Tibet.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Tara

Tara in Tibetan Buddhism is a female Bodhisattva. She is known as the mother of liberation, and represents the virtues of success in work and achievements.

Tara is a tantric meditation deity whose practice is used by practitioners of the Tibetan branch of Vajrayana Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and understand outer, inner and secret teachings about compassion and emptiness.



These two images, a painting and sculpture, are from a monastery that had been destroyed by the Chinese.

These monasteries are covered with images and statues. Buddhists come to these monasteries to pray and leave offerings.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Bodhisatva

The most important deity in Tibet was Avalokiteshvara, patron of Tibet and since the 15th century, linked to the Dali Lamas, who are believed to be his reincarnation.

The eleven headed, six-armed Avalokiteshvara is found in Tibet and East Asia.

All the elements are familiar, the lotus, the flaming aureole, the lion.



Bronze sculpture of Avalokiteshvara. His 11 heads and multiple arms provide him with more abilities to help people.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Mandala

No subject in Tibetan art has drawn more attention than the mandala. Originally used for liturgical purposes, to psychologists they are universal images that reflect fundamental human instincts.

For many, they attract through their order and harmony and levels of mystery, a range of emotional and intellectual meaning.



The mandala is actually based on Buddhist cosmology and Mount Meru. The temple as well as all mandalas are designed as models of the universe. Some are 2 dimensional and some are 3 as this one to the left.

Kalachakara mandala, Potala Palace

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Mandalas also represent the cosmos, in a diagram that gave order to the universe, including the central 'world mountain', where the aspirant is to find his or her own place and realize reintegration with the vast powers of nature and the gods.



Sand Mandalas are created by Buddhist monks based on complex designs. Various colored sand is poured in place over a number of days. Once the mandala is complete, it is destroyed. A reminder of the impermanence of all things.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

For many people today Tibetan Buddhism is personified by the 14th Dali Lama. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his peaceful resistance to Chinese domination in Tibet.

From exile in India, the Dali Lama continues to speak out on behalf of the Tibetan people and other issues related to problems in the world.



Now, the 14th Dali Lama functions as a bridge between the traditions of the past and the challenges that face Buddhism in the future.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

The present Dali Lama represents a line of incarnations that goes back to the 14th century. The title 'dali lama' was given to the third member of the lineage, Somsen Gyatso by a Mongol leader named Altan Khan. The Great fifth Dali Lama (1600s) made the Dali Lamas both spiritual and temporal leaders of Tibet, bringing the ideal of the 'righteous king' and the charismatic monk into one person.

The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet. Bodhisattvas are believed to be enlightened beings who have postponed their own nirvana and chosen to take rebirth in order to serve humanity



Gendun Drup, 1st Dalai Lama, 1391-1473

Previous Lamas are revered in Tibet almost as deities.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

In 1950 His Holiness was called upon to assume full political power after China's invasion of Tibet in 1949/50.

In 1954, the 14th Dali Lama went to Beijing for peace talks with Mao Zedong and other Chinese leaders, including Deng Xiaoping and Chou Enlai.

But finally, in 1959, with the brutal suppression of the Tibetan national uprising in Lhasa by Chinese troops, His Holiness was forced to escape into exile. Since then he has been living in Dharamsala, northern India.

The Chinese invaded Tibet and destroyed many of the monasteries throughout the country. They burned holy text and paintings and destroyed Buddhist sculpture.

There is no longer an independent country of Tibet. It is now part of China.



Chinese soldiers and Tibetan monks being rounded up by Chinese soldiers.

REVIEW week 8

Buddhism began moving outside India early on, even in the years of Ashoka.

Sri Lanka maintains the Theravada tradition, which stays true to the historic Buddha and his life.

As we move to the Himalayan Mountain range with Nepal and Tibet, the Mahayana and Esoteric traditions evolve.

Many more images of bodhisattvas, goddesses, protectors, etc. emerge.

We also see images of the earlier and future Buddhas.

NEXT WEEK

Next class we turn back to Hinduism in India.

We look at Hinduism in the 6th through the 10th centuries, especially how images and architecture are integrated.